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Robert Henryson. *Poems*. Selected and edited with an Introduction, Notes, and Glossary by Charles Elliott. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1963. xxvi + 184pp. 18 shillings.

Next year will see the centenary of the first collected edition of Henryson's *Poems and Fables*, published by David Laing. In the intervening years, Henryson's stock as a poet has risen steadily, so much so that Dr. Kurt Wittig does not scruple to say that "in his assimilation of European subject matter, of Chaucer's conception of the poetic art, and of Scottish characteristics, Robert Henryson is one of the greatest poets of the whole of Scottish literature, perhaps the greatest of all, certainly the one with the most marked personality" (*The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, 1958, p.52). More judiciously, the editor of this latest volume in the Clarendon Medieval and Tudor Series assigns Henryson to a place among the "Scottish Chaucerians" and calls him "less precious and more fundamental than James I, less immediately impressive and more practical than Dunbar, less 'allegorical' and more succinct than Douglas" (p.xv). These judgments do not rest on an extensive canon of poetry—one long work, two medium-sized ones, and thirteen lesser pieces. Of this, Mr. Elliott gives a complete *Morall Fabillis* and *Testament of Cresseid*, the "Complaint of Orpheus" from "Orpheus and Euridyce," and the following short poems: "The Garmont of Gud Ladeis," "The Annunciation," "The Bludy Serk," "The Thre Deid-Pollis," "Nerar Hevynis Blys" ("The Prais of Age"), "Ane Prayer for the Pest," and "Robene and Makyne." The reasons for excluding the other poems are convincing, and in any case they are readily available in Harvey Wood's editions (1st, 1933; 2nd, revised, 1958). Whoever meets Henryson for the first time in this selection will be well served. An acceptable text, normalized on sound editorial principles, is clearly presented, while the notes and glossary are accurate and pithy: *guid gear in sma' buik*. Only the "Appreciations" seem expendable—unnecessary mock-cream on an otherwise excellent cake. Could the general editor of the series be persuaded to substitute in forthcoming volumes a section devoted to "Criticism," which would reprint spirited essays of interpretation and analysis likely to offer fruitful approaches to the texts?

As for Henryson's "marked personality," Dr. Wittig speaks confidently about this in a literary sense. Biographically, the poet is a shadowy figure indeed. Tradition has associated him with the calling of schoolmaster in Dunfermline, and he died in time to qualify for inclusion in Dunbar's "Lament for the Makaris" (written c. 1505, printed, 1508-9).

REVIEWS

For the meagre facts that do exist about Henryson, Mr. Elliott refers us to David Laing's edition (*Poems and Fables*, 1865, pp.ix-xxi, xxxvii-lx). One notes that Mr. Elliott makes no attempt to describe the circumstances of a typical Scots schoolmaster of the late fifteenth century and what he might have taught and read, surely matters of some interest to Henryson's readers. In this connexion, use could have been made of the contributions to the *Innes Review* and the books that have arisen from this periodical: John Durkan and Anthony Ross, *Early Scottish Libraries* (1961) and *Essays on the Scottish Reformation 1513-1625*, ed. David McRoberts (1962). It is startling to find, in view of Henryson's realistic depiction of the ravages of leprosy, that in Glasgow in the early sixteenth century, "the grammar schoolmaster was also chaplain of the leper hospital of St. Ninian beyond Glasgow bridge," and that there is reason to believe that the Stirling schoolmaster acted in a similar capacity (*Essays*, "Education in the Century of the Reformation," pp.158-159 and n.118). Was this experience Henryson's too, one wonders? Then, Henryson apparently acted as a notary public in Dunfermline, and a good deal is known about this official in Scotland, whose social status was much higher than that of his counterpart in medieval England (*Essays*, "Parish Life in Scotland, 1500-1560," p.93). Henryson's breadth of contact with all walks of life becomes much more understandable in the light of such information. A critic's sensitivity to his subject's experience of life and the voices heard in his milieu can assist greatly in the work of interpretation and evaluation, as Francis Berry has reminded us recently in *Poetry and the Physical Voice* (1963). Perhaps the shadowy Henryson need not be so shadowy after all.

Aside from biographical oversights, Mr. Elliott provides a stimulating introduction. First, he addresses himself to the question, in what sense is Henryson a *Chaucerian*? He points out that the Scots poet looks to his English predecessor for some of his basic subject matter, and that in handling some of his topics he manifests a "Chaucerian protrusion of personality," either directly or obliquely or through simple extension of "area of reference," when a speaker becomes a champion for a group. Thus in "Ane Prayer for the Pest" the poetic voice takes up *our* quarrel with God, just as Harry Bailly rejects the Pardoner's claims on behalf of the pilgrims and, by natural extension, on behalf of the laity. In his attitude towards his material, Henryson also resembles Chaucer. Both poets, for example, show a capacity for disabusing their audience about easy acceptance of conventions, either literary or social. Mr. Elliott argues, too, that Henryson has the Chaucerian touch in his expression, particularly in the effective juxtaposition of rhetorical and colloquial passages. Fi-

STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

nally, the link between Henryson's and Chaucer's forms is pointed out, for instance, those of "Anelida's Complaint," "An A B C," and *Troilus and Criseyde*. In sum, Mr. Elliott makes out a very good case for saying that Henryson read Chaucer with care and intelligence; if this is what being a "Chaucerian" means, then he is one.

To assert Henryson's *autonomy* and *distinctiveness* from Chaucer, Mr. Elliott elects to discuss the *Morall Fabillis* and the *Testament of Cresseid*. In the case of the first poem it is noted that Henryson is firmly committed to the medieval Christian ethos. The world is represented as a dunghill or a wilderness; sojourners in it must look beyond its "wretchit-ness" and "vanitee" to the "blissit hour" to come. Hence, according to Mr. Elliott, arises the "dichotomizing" or "bifurcation" of the *Fabillis*. The fable proper is customarily worked out at the narrative level in a satisfying way from the literary point of view; sharply separated from the fable is a "Moralitas" which is blatantly didactic. At all costs, temporal values must be subordinated to spiritual ones. Mr. Elliott contrasts Chaucer's easier assurance that "the Catholic faith can contain centrifugal forces." The implication, of course, is that Henryson is thereby revealed as the lesser artist. But is he, in this regard? In a recent article, Mr. Denton Fox has demonstrated convincingly, through a careful topical and rhetorical analysis of "The Taill of the Cok and the Jasp" and "The Preiching of the Swallow," that narrow assumptions about the dichotomy between the Fabill and the Moralitas will not do ("Henryson's Fables," *ELH*, XXIX, 1962, 337-356). Mr. Fox holds to the unity of Henryson's vision and insists, for example, on the literary skill displayed in the ironic elevation of the cock through his aureate speech, his deflation in the course of the speeches about him by his wives, and the mordant note struck in the Moralitas, where the cock is declared to represent stupid man, and we realize that we are involved in his particular form of stupidity, i.e. male arrogance and blindness. The "Preiching" in Mr. Fox's view, asserts through the tellingly-registered moods and tones of the poem, "the ontological superiority of God," and the Moralitas has a functional role in establishing the relationship between the actual and ideal worlds which God comprehends. The basic contention of this article is that we should take seriously Henryson's statement about the purpose and mode of the kind of poetry he is writing in the *Fabillis*; this poetry is designed "... to repreif the haill misleving / Off man be figure of ane uther thing" (ll.6-7). In other words, Henryson is suggesting that the *Fabillis* can be interpreted in the same fashion as his contemporaries read the Old Testament, holding that it "prefigured" the New. The Aesopian animals talk like men; men sometimes behave like animals. The Moralitas does not

REVIEWS

blunt this satirical point—it can and does direct the satire to its target with power and artistry.

Henryson's chief claim to distinction, of course, lies with the *Testament of Cresseid*, that marvel of medieval literature, an extensive poem without longueurs, a veritable triumph of poetic attack and verve. Mr. Elliott sees it as a work dealing with sin, punishment, and regeneration, which transcends the code of *amour courtois* and invokes such forces as Providence and Destiny, and ultimately Divine Reason; this is his reading of the doom pronounced on Cresseid by the *parliament* of the gods, and of her final acceptance of a fate that is self-caused. Cresseid's Pride and Anger are represented as the immediate occasion of the suffering visited on her. The "falsing" of Troilus is artfully kept in the background until Cresseid learns of his unwitting kindness to her when she is a leper, at which point she can recognise the enormity of her initial offence:

'Thy lufe, thy lawtie and thy gentilnes
I countit small in my prosperitie,
Sa elevait I was in wantones
And clam upon the fickill quheill sa hie.
All faith and lufe I promissit to the
Was in the self fickill and frivolous:
O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troilus!

...

Nane but myself as now I will accuse.'

(ll.547-574)

When she is finally purged of self-pity by an instructed view of her lot, Cresseid wills her body to the worms and toads, and her spirit to Diana. The importance which Mr. Elliott attaches to Cresseid's display of Anger could be supported by an appeal to medieval psychology; witness St. Thomas's treatment of the sensitive appetite and his resolution of it into the concupiscible and irascible powers (*Summa Theologica*, Q.81, Art.3). On this view, Cresseid's tragedy arises because her appetite dominates her will and reason. The poem presents her at the point when her concupiscible power is blocked ("I fra luifferis left and all forlane!" l.140) and irascibility gets full reign ("Upon Venus and Cupid angerly / Scho cryit out," ll.124-5).

As it happens, however, Mr. Elliott's interpretation has already been challenged by the criticism that it continues a long-standing confusion about the moral centre of the poem ("Cresseid in Scotland," *TLS*, 9 April 1964, p.290). It is pointed out that we are asked to believe that Cresseid is punished for the Christian sins of Pride and Anger, manifested in her chiding of the gods Cupid and Venus. Less muddled thinking, it is claimed in the *TLS* article, suggests that Cresseid's cursing of the gods

STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

and her dream-vision of the *parliament* is an allegorical representation of her life after being discarded by Diomed. The offence for which she is punished is her failure to live according to the code of *amour courtois* which had brought her happiness in the past. This is the blasphemy in *deed*, for which Cupid says she must suffer bitter pains:

'Lo!' quod Cupide, 'quha will blaspheme the name
Of his awin god, outhir in word [or] deid,
To all goddis he dois baith lak and schame,
And suld have bitter panis to his meid:
I say this by yone wretchit Cresseid,
The quhilk throw me was sum tyme flour of lufe,
...'

(ll.274-279)

Still, a consensus of recent critical opinion is on Mr. Elliott's side in believing that more is involved in the *Testament* than the "courtly theme of the betrayal of a lover" ("Cresseid in Scotland"). Mr. Douglas Duncan, for instance, holds that the poet of the *Testament* is a Yeats-in-his-tower figure, aware of the loss of his sexuality and sympathetic to the similar, but naturally more poignant plight of a young woman: "... that seid [of lufe] with froist is slane," l.139). Out of Cresseid's bitterness and suffering is made a pessimistic, if guarded, exposure of a world lacking in divine justice of any merciful sort. The questioner of the social and political order in the *Morall Fabillis* now becomes the questioner of the theological order ("Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," *EIC*, XI, 1961, 128-135). Mr. Sidney Harth will have none of this and chooses to argue that the poem is an exercise in irony. He depicts the poet as a Noel Coward figure, drink in hand, compèring a display of typical behaviour by the pagan gods, who punish Cresseid for several transgressions—poor choice of sexual partner in an affair; prostitution; and contumacity towards themselves ("Henryson Reinterpreted," *EIC*, XI, 1961, 471-480). A more finished piece of criticism by Mr. A. C. Spearing affirms that the *Testament* is a true medieval tragedy, displaying the downward turn of Fortune's wheel as Cresseid's miseries relentlessly accumulate: betrayal, prostitution, disease, bitter self-knowledge, and death. Mr. Spearing's most penetrating insight lies in his awareness that the poem ultimately expands beyond the terms of reference of medieval tragedy and explores an "Euripidean situation": a conflict between cruel and powerful gods and an impotent, foolish, and wicked mortal, whose suffering involves the emotions of readers and engages their compassion ("The *Testament of Cresseid* and the 'High Concise Style,'" *Speculum*, XXXVII, 1962, 208-225).

REVIEWS

Herein is the way to a richer understanding of the poem—by means of a thorough analysis of its tragic rhythm, going beyond the Euripidean model even, and taking into account the enactment of tragic rituals which call on the deepest levels of our response to mimesis. The *prologue* strikes the right portentous note, from the reference to hail showers in April, with its hint of cosmological discord, to the dramatic irony of the welcome of the priest of Venus to a daughter who has sinned against Venus: "Thow art full deir ane gest" (l.105). The *agon* of Cresseid's angry crying out on the gods follows. The *climax* is provided by the *parliament* of the gods, while the *peripety* is to be found in the sentence passed on Cresseid by Saturn and Cynthia, and the *recognition* comes when Cresseid looks in the glass after her dream, and again when Calchas is admitted to her presence. The *pathos* or *sparagmos* of Cresseid's suffering among the leper-folk runs its course until her encounter with Troilus. This gives rise to the *epiphany*, when Cresseid perceives what she really is, and offers herself as "mirrour" and "exempill" to those who will survive her, sharing with them the knowledge she has gained at such terrible cost. As *nemesis* overtakes *hybris*, Cresseid appears to us as a tragic protagonist, incorporating elements of the *alazon* and the *pharmakos*, the self-deceiver who becomes a scapegoat and promotes in onlookers the authentic *purgation* of pity and fear. [For a commentary on the terms used in this discussion, see Francis Ferguson, *The Idea of a Theatre* (1949), and Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957).]

Though Mr. Elliott might not sanction such an interpretation, he is certainly responsible for making us think again about Henryson by providing so admirable a text. The poet is indeed fortunate in his editor; both are true sons of Mercurius, who most assuredly can "in brief sermone ane pregnant sentence wryte."

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John Prebble. *The Highland Clearances*. London. Secker & Warburg. 1963. 35 shillings.

In this moving account of the diaspora of the clansmen of the North and of the Isles, Mr. Prebble has closed, it would appear, his tragic chronicles of the Scottish Highlands. In his *Culloden*, he recounted the sacrifices made in '45 by the clansmen at the summons of their chiefs; in *The Highland Clearances*, he has laid bare the shameful and ironic and tragic